DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 271 860 EA 018 649

AUTHOR Robson, Maurice
TITLE Identifying Processes for Coherent Curriculum Planning at a School Level: The Ministerial Paper No. 6 and Schools Project.
PUB DATE Apr 86
NOTE 16p.; In: A State in Action: Working with Schools for Program Improvement. Symposium presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (67th, San Francisco, California, April 16-20, 1986). Session 813; see EA 018 844. Attachments contain small print.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Change Agents; *Change Strategies; *Curriculum Development; Educational Change; Elementary Secondary Education; Foreign Countries; Government School Relationship; Program Implementation; State Departments of Education; State Programs
IDENTIFIERS Australia (Victoria)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of the Ministerial Paper No. 6 and Schools Project is to develop strategies and materials for use by individual schools in the state of Victoria, Australia, as they plan and implement curricula consistent with the guidelines in the Victoria Ministry of Education's Ministerial Paper 6. The strategies focus on improving the balance and coherence of the curriculum both horizontally (across subject areas) and vertically (across grade levels). The project also models a collaborative approach to educational change. The project is currently testing its major product, a resource kit for schools. The kit contains an outline of project goals, a guide to the kit's contents, an index listing 33 processes for supporting curriculum balance, materials detailing each strategy, an index of related programs and processes, and examples of practical implementation. Project development involved selecting test sites, visiting the sites, developing strategies and materials, evaluating the materials through practical testing, and revising the materials for production, dissemination, and implementation. Reflections on what the process has shown about curricular change conclude this report. A draft version of the index of strategies and an example of the more detailed coverage given each of the strategies (in this case those related to small group meetings) are attached. (PGD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED271860

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Maurice Robson
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

IDENTIFYING PROCESSES FOR COHERENT CURRICULUM PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION AT A SCHOOL LEVEL: THE MINISTERIAL PAPER NO. 6 AND SCHOOLS PROJECT

Maurice Robson

Victoria College - Toorak Campus
Victoria, Australia

EA 018 649

Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco, April, 1986

IDENTIFYING PROCESSES FOR COHERENT CURRICULUM PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION AT A SCHOOL LEVEL

PURPOSE

In mid-1985 Victoria College's Centre for Studies in the Curriculum was commissioned by those responsible for the MP6 implementation process to undertake the Ministerial Paper No. 6 and Schools Project. The project team comprises the four Victoria College representatives participating in this symposium.

The central purpose of the project is the development of strategies and materials which can be used by individual schools as they seek to plan and implement curriculum which is consistent with the guidelines in Ministerial Paper 6. In particular, the project aims to develop and disseminate effective processes for improving the balance and coherence of the curriculum for the student, both horizontally across subject areas, and vertically across year levels within the context of the teaching and learning principles and decision-making processes expressed in the Ministerial Paper (MP6). This project is linked to the development of the Curriculum Frameworks currently being developed within the Ministry of Education, and to other aspects of the Ministerial Paper 6 implementation process.

In addition, an important aspect of the project is the modelling of a collaborative approach to change which is a key element in the ministerial paper.

INTENDED OUTCOMES

The main product of the project is to be a resource kit which will assist schools to examine, evaluate and improve their curriculum offerings and processes.

In developing the kit the following have been key considerations. Specifically, the kit must

(a) be reasonably simple to access and use

(b) meet the needs of various levels, sizes and types of schools

(c) be accompanied by carefully planned and adequately resourced support processes to facilitate adoption and implementation of the strategies and processes included.

Whilst the kit is presently in a variety of schools for trialling purposes and is yet to be further refined, it is intended that it comprise the following six parts:

1. An outline of the aims of MP6, and those of the kit - in helping develop curriculum which is balanced and coherent.

2. A guide to the contents of the kit and some suggestions about how it might be used.

3. An index listing 33 processes and conditions which are ways of supporting curriculum balance and coherence. Grouped under five major headings, the index provides a basis for selection by a school of appropriate processes, strategies and materials consistent with perceived needs and concerns. (See Attachment 1)

4. A resource kit in which each of the thirty-three processes and conditions in the index is detailed separately with relevant key questions, strategies, pitfalls and illustrations included. An example of one of these is included in Attachment 2. The kit will thus comprise a box of cards which may be accessed according to what the school perceives to be its present curriculum needs and concerns.

5. An alternative index of programs, activities and strategies already developed by schools which support a balanced, and coherent curriculum. This index will be cross-referenced with the resources kit and provides another route into that kit. (See 4 above)

6. Illustrations and references providing detailed working examples of how other teachers in Victorian schools have successfully implemented these programs, activities and strategies.

DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES

Stage 1: Initial Contacts with Schools

Four schools are centrally involved in the project - two primary (elementary) and two post-primary schools. The schools were nominated by the Ministry of Education.

Initial contacts were made with representatives from each school at a workshop concerned with aspects of classroom management led by Jane Stallings.

Subsequently, the project team made an initial visit to each school. These visits served to continue the process of building trust between the team and staff, students and parents in each school. They also provided an opportunity to gather preliminary information about the schools and the curriculum processes and strategies being employed which were consistent with MP6. Available school documentation (e.g. policy statements) and discussions with teachers and parents were principle sources of data.

Stage 2: In-Depth Visits

Analysis of documents, further analysis of the MP6 guidelines, and reflection upon discussions in the schools provided the basis for detailed discussions with staff during the one to two days which were spent in each school. A representative cross-section of staff as well as students and parents were interviewed.

Stage 3: Development of Draft Strategies and Materials

The next stage was the development of strategies and materials based upon those processes and conditions which appear to contribute to curriculum balance and coherence and which were identified during Stage 2 of the project. The project team worked through several drafts to produce a "trial version" of the resource kit.

Stage 4: Formative Evaluation of Draft Materials

This present stage includes further visits, consultations and negotiations with the schools to refine and modify the strategies and materials developed thus far. To facilitate this process, the materials have been forwarded to a range of other schools and individuals so that a broad sampling of opinion, feedback and further suggestions is obtained.

Stage 5: Revision, Production, Dissemination and Implementation

The final stages of the project will include:

(a) the revision of the materials in the light of the information gathered in the previous stage

(b) the handing on of the prototype kit to the Ministry for publication and distribution

(c) the planning of dissemination and implementation processes. This will include presentation of materials at a State wide curriculum conference in May.

REFLECTIONS

It is now widely recognised that the task of securing change in school policies and practices is a complex one, and one for which the fruits of the endeavour often are slow to be realised. This project is still in progress and its "fruits" are yet to appear. Nevertheless, the project thus far has yielded valuable insights into the process of curriculum change and the role to be played in that process by 'outsiders', particularly tertiary institutions.

(1) The strong positive support for the project and high level of interest amongst staff, students and parents indicates a concern to be involved and, secondly and more subtly perhaps, an eagerness to find out how other schools tackle common issues in curriculum. A valuable aspect of the project has been the opportunity it has afforded staff to visit other schools and gain insights still not commonly available to teachers in what Ryan calls the second most private social activity (Joyce, 1981) - that of teaching.

This was made possible by the provision of funds in the project for the hiring of substitute teachers to enable staff to spend time with the project team and to make visits to other participating schools. A project of this kind can thus play an important role in breaking down the isolation of teachers from one another.

(2) The support given to the project team, and the experience gained in the project, support the importance of collaboration and negotiation with schools in the process of curriculum change. Whilst there were differences in what schools expected of the project and of the team the high level of support is taken to indicate the value schools attach to being involved. This is not least because this process implicitly attaches value to the perspectives of teachers, students and parents and gives recognition to their ability to reflect critically upon their role in the process of change. This, in turn, is likely to nurture a commitment to further improvement of curriculum (Taylor, 1980; Smyth, 1981). It is generally recognised that individuals are more often committed to projects in which they have a particular involvement (Tisher, 1977; Robson, 1984).

(3) The project yields some insights into the role played by tertiary institutions in assisting schools in the implementation of State policy initiatives. The role played by 'outsiders' in the process of change is necessarily a delicate one. The literature contains many examples of curriculum projects which have failed, in part at least because of the promethean approach to change typically characterised by an "invasion of experts" into schools carrying with them practices and strategies developed without adequate reference to context or school needs and predicated on the assumption that change comes from such external provision. There are, therefore clear dangers for those who would attempt to assist in the process of change as 'outsiders'.

The role of 'outsider' also has, however, its positive aspects. As staff of a tertiary institution, the members of the project team have been able to glean information concerning curriculum processes which, as staff members in the school, they might not have so easily obtained. In addition, their position allows them to bring a broader perspective to bear and to gather and disseminate information in ways which cannot be as easily accomplished by staff in schools.

(4) Finally, although the project was initiated and funded by the Ministry of Education, and whilst the team has had regular consultations with senior Ministry personnel, it has operated independently. The team has thus been able to bring a different perspective to bear on the process of securing change.

In summary, the collaborative approach to change adopted in this project is consistent with that enshrined in MP6 and therefore the team has been able to adopt the role of 'critical friend' and provide a means by which existing sound curriculum strategies and processes might be documented and additional ones developed in ways which promote ownership of any change. It is recognised that the targetted schools were nominated by the Ministry, however a broader range of schools has been involved in Stage three of the project so that the final product/kit might contain strategies and materials more likely to be used by schools.

Draft 2/86

MINISTERIAL PAPER NO. 6 AND SCHOOLS PROJECT

MAKING IT ALL HANG TOGETHER :

DEVELOPING A MORE BALANCED AND COHERENT CURRICULUM

PROGRESSIVE LISTING OF PROCESSES AND CONDITIONS

The list below summarises processes and conditions seen to be relevant to the development and maintenance of balanced and coherent curricula. The list is subject to ongoing revision both in its content and its organisation.

It has been tentatively divided into sections to aid its use. Because the sections inevitably overlap there is cross referencing of items between sections.

For each item a specification is being developed which seeks to

- describe the process or condition, establish its purpose/s and give examples
- provide guidelines as to how the process or condition can be developed and effectively implemented
- identify potential pitfalls or difficulties to be avoided

A Relating to Teachers

A1 Teacher placement

Deploying teachers to positions of "best fit":

- appropriate school
- appropriate placement within the school
- planned changes of placement within the school.

A2 Teacher induction and professional development

Processes that enable teachers to:

- quickly come to understand the program and their place in it
- make a continuing and skilled contribution to developing and maintaining curriculum balance and coherence.

A3 Teacher location

Office and staffroom arrangements which foster communication among teachers responsible for the program of particular students.

A4 Home group teacher

Developing the role of the home group teacher as link person and course advisor to include:

- thorough familiarity with the students' programs
- acting as a focus for fostering horizontal coherence
- responsibility for course advice and transmission of relevant information.

B Relating to Communication

B1 Small group meetings and specific focus working parties

Formal groups established for ongoing or short-term purposes relating to curriculum balance and coherence:

- learning area groups
- year level groups
- groups with common interest in or responsibility for particular students
- special purpose groups

B2 Staff/school community conferences

Opportunities arranged for extended consideration of and planning for curriculum balance and coherence.

B3 Cross-faculty staff involvement

- staff with expertise primarily in one curriculum area contributing a particular perspective to programs in another
- staff with expertise primarily in one curriculum area visiting meetings in another faculty to gain or exchange information and ideas.

B4 Collaborative decision-making processes (see E3)

B5 Staff-student consultation
Processes such as curriculum negotiation which assist in the identification of opportunities for integration or the likelihood of potential overlaps.

B6 Involvement of consultants

B7 Teacher location (see A3)

B8 Information dissemination processes
Procedures designed to assist rapid and effective transmission of information relevant to curriculum balance and coherence.

B9 Social Programs

C <u>Relating to Curriculum and Organisation</u>

C1 Some organizational forms relating to vertical coherence

- multi-age grouping of students for learning
- vertical modular grouping

C2 Some organizational forms relating to horizontal coherence

- multi-discipline teams

"thematic studies including community based projects
"curriculum based on "broad fields" learning areas

C3 Curriculum and assessment based on developmental schemes focussing on processes and learning outcomes (see D1)

C4 Cross-faculty staff involvement (see B3)

C5 Entry prerequisites for curriculum components
Establishment of prior learning experiences or achievements, where appropriate, which enable entry to particular programs.

C6 Accreditation of curriculum components within the school
Processes which ensure that programs are known, documented and approved as being suitable in the context of the total curriculum.

C7 Planning focusses on both processes and content
Development and use of curriculum documentation which identifies planned process learning as well as content.

C8 Collaborative decision making processes (see E1)

D Relating to Use and Management of Information

D1 Documentation of programs (see C6)

D2 Cumulative developmental records for students (see C3)
Records of student learning achievements which provide information as the student progresses through schooling.

D3 Information dissemination processes (see B8)

See also:- Evaluation - collection of appropriate information to help determine which areas or issues in the school should be addressed. (USING THE KIT : 1)

E Relating to Policy and Administration

E1 Existence of school policies which support balance and coherence
School policies are needed which support the principles involved, establish the structures within which they can operate, and require relevant tasks to be undertaken.

E2 Dynamic curriculum management
Strong curriculum leadership, provision of needed resources and appropriate professional development and support.

E3 Collaborative decision making
Students and parents assisting in identifying inadequate balance and coherence and contributing to planning for enhancing these aspects.

E4 Existence of system arrangements which support balance and coherence (see A1, A2, B8, C6, etc.).

B1 : SMALL GROUP MEETINGS AND WORKING PARTIES

The creation of formal groups for ongoing or short-term purposes provides one effective means of fostering communication between all "stake- holders". It also promotes the development of shared understandings relevant to curriculum balance, integration and coherence. Groups provide important opportunities for staff to become aware of the values, attitudes and skills being taught in other curriculum areas.

When using small groups or working parties to promote communication and contribution to curriculum development, consideration should be given to:

1] different types of groups appropriate to specific needs

2] strategies for effective operation

3] organisational or timetabling arrangements

GUIDELINES:

1] **DIFFERENT TYPES OF GROUPS ARE APPROPRIATE TO DIFFERENT NEEDS**

(a) Learning area groups made up of staff from related discipline/ subject areas. They meet regularly to develop subject matter and/or teaching strategies which promote coherence in the curriculum and minimise overlap.

(b) Year level groups - Teachers meet to examine/discuss/plan curriculum content and teaching strategies across the total curriculum at a particular year level.

(c) "Pastoral" groups meet to review and plan for the progress of particular students through the curriculum and monitor coherence in the curriculum. Such groups should include parents and students wherever appropriate (see A4 & B5).

(d) Special purpose groups can be established to develop teaching strategies which provide for curriculum integration.

KEY QUESTIONS

Does co-operative teaching and professional sharing of ideas occur between teachers of the same year level/curriculum or subject area?

What avenues exist for parent/student participation?

In what ways are groups used to examine student progress and monitor coherence in the curriculum?

2) STRATEGIES ARE NEEDED WHICH PROMOTE EFFECTIVE OPERATION

Groups can work most effectively where their membership, size, group dynamics and purpose are well planned, and where organisational arrangements are made to support their operation.

(a) Membership should be representative of all "stakeholders" - staff, students and parents, in light of the purpose of the group.

KEY QUESTIONS

Is parent or student participation expected or are they merely invited to participate?

Do existing structures/administrative arrangements (e.g. times) preclude parent/student participation?

Does the membership of the group allow participants to work well together, and to make full use of their abilities?

(b) The size of the group should be limited.

KEY QUESTION

Does group size allow for the maximum individual participation and contribution in time available for meetings?

(c) Group dynamics - Setting up a group does not guarantee that it will be effective or productive. Individual group members will continue to play particular roles or represent sectional interests until a degree of trust is developed within the group.

KEY QUESTIONS

Does the group include members with skills in facilitating group processes?

In what ways are group members encouraged to contribute openly to discussions?

How do groups make decisions about curriculum?

- by majority rule?
- by coalition rule?
- by mean rule?
- by individual rule?
- by executive/principal decision?

46.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

What expectations are held about group procedures? Is the meeting

a friendly chat?

a pooling of ignorance?

a legalistic or legislative process focussing on crossing t's and dotting i's?

a soap box?

a forum for the sharing and discussion of well thought out ideas conducted with the goal of making a decision?

Consensus may be derived more quickly and efficiently where individuals present ideas as "position papers".

(d) The purpose/focus of the group is clear and procedures established for the follow-up and communication of decisions.

KEY QUESTIONS

Are decisions of the group ignored/subverted/over-ruled?

What channels exist to ensure group decisions are considered by the relevant committee?

3] ORGANISATIONAL OR TIMETABLING ARRANGEMENTS SHOULD SUPPORT EFFECTIVE FUNCTIONING OF GROUPS

Groups can only work effectively when all group members are able to fully participate. Administrative arrangements need to ensure this is possible.

KEY QUESTIONS

Are common periods of non-teaching time specifically allocated for group meetings?

Are meeting times planned at times when parents and/or students are available?

What arrangements exist to enable staff with related responsibilities to plan and communicate?

Is the venue for group meetings conducive to effective/productive group functioning e.g. lighting, furniture?

In what ways does the school administration facilitate (support) the effective functioning of groups or working parties? What more needs to be done?

PITFALLS

1. Individual concerns about one's own teaching competence may preclude frank and open disclosure of curriculum content/teaching strategies.

2. Attempts to establish fully representative membership of groups may be inappropriate or even counterproductive where it makes the group too large to be effective and/or where individuals are included without sufficient regard for "best fit" or likely contribution.

3. An individual's effectiveness in any one group may be limited by involvement in several groups.

4. An information monopoly can exist in groups and prevent honest communication because individuals do not wish to expose their lack of knowledge. This is particularly the case where groups include individuals with differing degrees of power.

5. A poorly functioning committee may achieve less than an efficient individual leader who has the respect of his/her staff.

Illustrations

Kingswood Primary School - year level teaching teams which plan the week by week program/teaching strategies during a common timetabled non-teaching hour.

Special School meetings - planning and goal setting meetings for students with particular needs are often held. They involve the student, parents and all his/her teachers.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE